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29 FEBRUARY 1980

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Fifty years on...

In the TLS of February 27, 1930, C. E. M. Joad's *The Present and Future of Religion* was reviewed by Middleton Murry:

It is a pity that the publishers of Mr Joad's book can say with truth that it is "passionate and frivolous." To be sure, there is more passion than frivolity; but the frivolity is sometimes in very bad taste. The book does more than make us uncomfortable in the case of a philosopher who takes seriously of the "values" of Goodness and Beauty—it makes us fairly suspicious of his right to speak of them. Traditional religion is declining fast. Mr Joad is true, pays no attention to the fact that there is, in certain sections of the very generation of which he speaks, a reaction towards the Christian religion in its most dogmatic and authoritarian form. The interest deepens when we reach the speculation on the future of religion. Here, in part, Mr Joad follows Mr. H. G. Wells's ideas as expressed in "The Open Conspiracy"; but, unlike Mr. Wells, he does not believe that devotion to an open conspiracy may come to satisfy the religious needs of this or future generations. Religion, in some form, is necessary. Mr Joad is clear about that.

He has two positions. First, he accepts the mystical experience as experiences of a real though transcendent object. He claims no first-hand knowledge of the experience; nor does his language show any sign of study of the mystics themselves. The deficiency is of some importance; for it enables him more easily to shift his ground to a second position, which is that there exists a permanent, perfect, changeless world of value. This world he identifies with the object of mystical contemplation.

The object of life's evolution, as I conceive it, is to free itself entirely from the world of matter, and to come to rest in the perfect, and untrammelled contemplation of the world of value. But, I repeat, the permanent perfect cannot be continuous with the imperfect and changing; it could, it, without ceasing to be itself, enter into communion with the imperfect and changing. For this reason, though the religious consciousness may have to know God, the religious man cannot hope to become one with the which he knows.

That is clear enough; but it is not, as Mr Joad seems to think, metaphysically opposed to the religious experience. Mr Joad's own religious experience Mr Joad evidently knows.

Between Destroyers and Deliverers

By Christopher Longuet-Higgins

FREEMAN DYSON:
Disturbing the Universe
283pp. Harper and Row. £6.95.
0 06 337004 G

And indeed there will be time
To wonder, "Do I dare?" and
Time to turn back and descend the
stair,
With a bald spot in the middle of
my hair...

Do I dare
Disturb the universe?
"The fact is," writes Freeman Dyson, "that I am in some respects a peculiar scientist, just as Lewis Carroll was a peculiar mathematician." Indeed he is—as his friends already know, and his readers will quickly discover. *Disturbing the Universe* is not at all the sort of autobiography that might be expected of a leading scientist: a confident, matter-of-fact, blow-by-blow success story. It is a series of glimpses into the life of a highly gifted and sensitive person, struggling to reconcile his otherworldly concerns with his obligations to a confused and pathetic humanity. The actual events which he recollects, and the people he describes, though fascinating in themselves, are subordinated to his main theme—the gulf that divides aspiration from achievement, and the shadow that falls between the motion and the act.

It all goes back to "a small boy with a book, high up in a tree." The book was Edith Nesbit's *The Magic City*—a story about a crazy universe in which, if you were forced a piece of machinery, you are forced to go on using it for the rest of your life. Science and technology, take heed. There will come, it is prophesied, a Destroyer and a Deliverer, but the Deliverer will in the end prevail. Half a century after his death became Deliverer to half the world and Destroyer to the other half. Some scientists acquire reputations as deliverers or destroyers, and we meet them later in Dyson's book. "The greatest and most genuine deliverer," he says, "is Einstein, but Dyson did not know him personally, and can add nothing to what others have written about him. But is the scientist fated to adopt one or other role, or can he stand apart as a 'honest craftsman', building good tools for other people to use? Dyson would like to think that he can.

Next we meet the schoolboy prodigy swotting differential equations while his father is out clearing ditches. His mother persuades him of the dangers of one-sidedness, and he joins the father in the account for one afternoon. "No angels came to wait me to heaven", but the seeds of a wider awareness had been sown. Reflecting later on the hardships and injustices that were driving the world to war, Dyson found an answer in the principle of "Cosmic Unity"—the essential identity of all conscious beings. If this was not a rediscovery of Buddhist doctrine, it was undeniably a near miss.

Then comes the war, and we find Dyson at Bomber Command, doing operational research on the bombing of German cities. People who court the military mind will relish the chapter entitled "The Children's Crusade" for its merciless exposures, but Dyson cannot possibly have enjoyed writing it. His savage lashes are reserved for himself.

Since the beginning of the war I had been retreating step by step, from one moral position to another, until at the end I had no moral position at all. At the beginning of the war I believed fiercely in the brotherhood of man, called myself a follower of Gandhi and was morally opposed to all violence. After a year of war I retreated, and said, Unfortunately, non-violent resistance against Hitler is impracticable, but I am still morally opposed to bombing. A few years later I said, Unfortunately it seems that bombing is necessary in order to win the war, and so I am willing to go to work for Bomber Command, but I am still opposed to bombing cities indiscriminately. After I arrived at Bomber Command I said, Unfortunately it

turns out that we are after all bombing cities indiscriminately, but this is morally justified as it is helping to win the war. A year later I said, Unfortunately it seems that our bombing is not really helping to win the war, but at least I am morally justified in working to save the lives of the bomber crews. In the last spring of the war I could no longer find any excuses.

Driven from one moral nightmare to another, Dyson finds that the poets have endured similar agonies, and can give him strength when he most needs it. At school he was deeply influenced by Frank Thompson, the inventor of the hydrogen bomb, and a chapter entitled "The Blood of a Poet" is devoted to him. Thompson was not named by his years at Winchester; he believed passionately in the communist ideal, and went heroically to his execution in 1944, after a mock trial in the Bulgarian village of Litakovo. Dyson was profoundly affected by his death, and by a fanatical idealism which he could admire, even if he did not share it. But such thoughts were soon eclipsed by the destruction of Hiroshima and did not return until many years after the fighting came to an end.

The war over, and his mathematical education complete, Dyson goes to Cornell as a graduate student to study under Hans Bethe, one of the giants of modern physics. At its best, scientific training is still an apprenticeship, and by Bethe's account Dyson was the most brilliant student he ever had. It was suggested that he should do a few experiments to get the feel of the subject, but after a near electrocution Dyson decided to stick to theory. An essential part of a young scientist's education is to meet the leaders of his subject, and we are introduced to such legendary figures as Richard Feynman, Edward Teller and Robert Oppenheimer. Feynman is a student of Oppenheimer, "a young creative genius whose ideas about electro-dynamics are as baffling as they are unorthodox. He and Dyson, physicist and mathematician, complement each other's talents, and become firm friends. Dyson describes, with disarming modesty, how he succeeded in unifying Feynman's notions with the apparently quite different theory being developed by Julian Schwinger at Harvard, and with some theoretical proposals made earlier by S. T. Dymnikov. Inspiration came on a three-day trip on a Greyhound bus from San Francisco to Chicago—arguably a more important bus ride than that on which Kekule conceived his strange theory of the benzene ring. Afterwards Feynman, Schwinger and Tomonaga shared a Nobel Prize for their discoveries in quantum electrodynamics; Dyson might well have been admitted to their company.

Our next port of call is the Institute for Advanced Study at Princeton, directed by the great Robert Oppenheimer. The institute gives

hospitality to scholars of all sorts; T. S. Eliot is there, personally invited by the Director. Later Oppenheimer said: "I invited Eliot here in the hope that he would produce another masterpiece, and all he did here was to work on *The Cocktail Party*, the worst thing he ever wrote." Dyson is there to work under Oppie's supervision, but is bursting to explain his version of the new quantum electrodynamics. For a few weeks Oppenheimer's hostility to Dyson's message is absolute; and then, quite suddenly, after a visit and a seminar from Hans Bethe—"Well, I have no doubt Dyson will have told you all about that"—the tables are turned and Dyson finds in his mailbox a small piece of paper with the words "Not contendere, R.D." scrawled on it in his handwriting. He is appointed a long-term member of the institute, and lives happily ever after.

The next group of characters to appear includes Freeman's father Sir George Dyson, composer of *The Canterbury Pilgrims*, and Edward Teller, the inventor of the hydrogen bomb and the agent of Robert Oppenheimer's ultimate downfall. It is a measure of the moral discomfort which has afflicted physicists since the war that so many good friends strain to tell the evidence dominated the trial at which Oppenheimer was found to be a security risk to the development of nuclear weapons. Dyson is sure that no personal betrayal was intended, but Hans Bethe, among others, never forgave Teller for what happened. Dyson's own comments leave the detachment of a Greek Chorus:

Oppenheimer's trial was simply a campaign led by a group of paranoid patriots who were trying to silence opposition to their policies by a personal attack on their most visible opponent. By joining made himself an object of hatred and distrust by a whole generation of young people. He wounded himself more grievously than he wounded Oppenheimer. . . . In the end, each of them was irrevocably committed to exercises of the human will in the political as well as the technical sphere. And so each of them in his own way came to grief.

Having, in due course, become an American citizen (the British Home Office would not recognize the legitimacy of his children), Dyson throws himself into the radical affairs of his new home. He interests himself in the design of fool-proof nuclear reactors, and becomes a part-time member of the Arms Control and Disarmament Agency. His account of the studies and negotiations in which he was personally concerned is oddly detached, as if he were a historian reporting events over which the participants had no control whatever. A telephone call that he made may or may not have been influential in securing agreement to the test ban; a report to

which he contributed may have persuaded the Americans not to use nuclear weapons in Vietnam; it is so on. His loyalty to Edward Teller prompts him to publish in *Foreign Affairs* an out-and-out attack on the idea of a permanent nuclear test ban, but in retrospect he castigates his arguments on technical, military, political and moral grounds, and terms reminiscent of his change of heart about the bombing of German cities. But there is no mistaking his admiration for Matthew Meselson, the biologist who, largely single-handed, dissuaded the military establishment from giving priority to the development of biological weapons. If Teller was a Destroyer, then Meselson was equally a Deliverer.

But I suspect that the reader will not fully understand Freeman Dyson's ambivalent attitude to scientific politics until he reaches that part of the book which describes Dyson's consuming passion for the exploration of the universe. Many keen youngsters have gone into space research, but no one else that I know of has designed and constructed, with a minimum of technical assistance, an entirely new kind of space rocket. Only a scientist of quite extraordinary dedication would have the temerity to embark, in his spare time, on the development of a rocket propelled by atomic bomb explosions at its rear. It is a miracle that the Orion project, as they called it, actually got off the ground (using chemical explosives) before the project was wound up and its fate sealed by the prohibition of nuclear explosions in the atmosphere. Dyson admits that time has passed this particular project by; he now regards it as a messy and inelegant solution to the problems of interstellar propulsion. But his enthusiasm for cosmic exploration has not waned one jot; he is firmly convinced that human destiny lies out there, among the stars, and that someone, some day, is going to get there.

The snag, of course, is the painful realities of here and now; the armaments race, the spread of nuclear weapons, the energy crisis and the possible abuse of biological discoveries. Dyson has something challenging to say about each of these subjects, as one who has been personally involved. Both scientifically and politically. But he is unusually frightening about the technical aspects of the atomic bomb. It is one thing to find most of the relevant "secrets" in the open literature, as one of his students did, at his suggestion; and quite another to carry out the highly technical engineering operations that would be required to make an atom bomb which actually exploded, rather than simply making a nasty radioactive mess.

The last section of the book is called "Points Beyond", and takes the reader far into the future, and far into the realms of speculation.

Is it an illusion to suppose that entities, each dispensable to the other? Or is the universe nothing if not disturbed by the beholder? Are there extra-terrestrial civilizations, commanding the resources of a star, or even civilizations which command the resources of an entire galaxy? What would their technologies be like? Would they depend on specially designed self-reproducing machines, capable of supplying any material need? Could we improve our own technology now or soon, so as to avoid fouling Earth beyond repair?

In everything we undertake, either on earth or in the sky, we have a choice of two styles. . . . I call the gray and the green. . . . Factories are gray, gardens are green. Physics is gray, biology is green. Human field manuals are gray, poems are green. Why should we not simply say, gray is good, and green is good, and find a quick path to salvation by embracing green technology and banning everything gray? Because to answer the world's material needs, technology has to be not only beautiful but also cheap.

But who said gray technology was cheap? Freeman Dyson has a son George, who lives with his friends on the Canadian Pacific Islands. George has adopted an all-green life style; he built his own house in a tree and constructed his own ocean-going canoe. Freeman went to visit George a few years ago, not having seen him for a long time. While he was there, he saw his son save the lives of two friends whose boat had capsized in a storm. Freeman's mind goes back to an occasion on which he himself might have saved a life by quick and decisive action: "By saving these two, George had made up for the one I failed to save."

In the penultimate chapter, Dyson takes us to one of the oldest themes of Natural Theology: I conclude from the existence of these accidents of physics and astronomy that the universe is an unexpectedly hospitable place for living creatures to make their home in. Being a scientist, trained in the habits of thought and language of the twentieth century rather than the eighteenth, I do not claim that the architecture of the universe proves the existence of God. I claim only that the architecture of the universe is consistent with the hypothesis that mind plays an essential role in its functioning.

In the last chapter of all, he lowers his professional guard and retails two mystical dreams, in language which is would be forgivable in a paraphrase. We discover where his heart really lies—with his children, and with all those children who, if the Destroyer can be held in check, will one day inherit the earth and roach out their hands to the sky.

A peculiar scientist—yes, but a no less fascinating human being. For a person of such astonishing intelligence Freeman Dyson himself possesses many of the qualities of a child. An unbounded imagination, a penetrating vision, a readiness to idolize his heroes and, by contrast, to denigrate his own actions and achievements. But this could equally be said of the poets whom he quotes so effectively, and to whom he turns so often for illumination about the springs of human action. It is possible that he has seen his image reflected in some lines which he does not quote, written by one of his favourite poets:

O hang the head.
Impetuous child with the tremulous brain,
O weep, child, weep; O weep away
Lost innocence who wished your
lover dead,
Weep for the lives your wishes
never led.

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Self-Knowledge

Why does it always come as a surprise
to realise there are people who dislike you,
when an uncomplimentary word (like shit or bitch)
is reported as used to describe you?
They are fierce against you as hawks, undoubtful—
and you always imagined you were so lovable!

Of course they may have got you wrong;
or they may hate you simply because you're English
or French or American; there are many stereotypes.
Instant hatred is very easy.
Class can bring it on, perhaps, your way of speaking—
what you think's refined they consider a twilitte squeaking.

But remember, even murderers don't think they're wicked.
Hitler, for example, thought he was helping Germany
by killing all those horrible Jews and subversive Reds.
He never regarded himself as ghastly.
So that might comfort you. Let there be light! Be
glad to learn you're not as nice as you might be!

Gavin Ewart

By Kyriil FitzLyon

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In the dry season of age

By Peter Lewis

PAUL BAILEY:
Old Soldiers
320pp, Jonathan Cape, £4.95,
0 224 01783 7

When Paul Bailey published his first novel, *At the Jerusalem* (1967), at the height of the Swinging Sixties, any young writer working in what was considered to be the passé convention of "fiction" could count himself fortunate to receive much acclaim. The "death of the novel" issue was reaching the point at which undertakers were being summoned: the Circus of the theatre was alluring literary talent with the illusion of a Second Elizabethan Age; and poetry was enjoying a colossal vogue. Who needed conventional fiction? Yet despite the climate of the times, Bailey's singularly unadorned novel was appreciated for the extraordinary debut it was. This response was probably owed something to the surprise at finding a first novel by a young man in his twenties about old age; yet Bailey's achievement did not, of course, lie in writing about the problems of old people, but in doing so with such sensitivity and sympathy while remaining un sentimentally objective.

In *Old Soldiers*, his fifth novel and his most carefully crafted one since *At the Jerusalem*, Bailey returns to the subject of old age and concentrates on two sharply contrasting men in their seventies, both with unforgettable memories of the First World War. The retired banker, Victor Barker, and the bizarre chameleon, Eric Telton, whose real identity is revealed only at the end, are old soldiers in the metaphorical sense, too, although beneath their superbly maintained facades both are essentially vulnerable and fragile. Bailey's two-word title manages to be both ambiguous and ironic.

The narrative turns on the chance encounter of the two old men in St Paul's Cathedral. The respectable, conventional, superficially dry-as-dust Victor, who much younger wife has recently died, returns to London after more than fifty years in Newcastle so as to escape from an almost unbearable loneliness and numerous associations of past contentment. Even the hated London of his childhood seems preferable to the city where at the age of forty he unexpectedly found happiness with a woman he loved but did not expect to love him. The man he meets in London has been running the same life for much longer—since the First World War in fact—and has concealed his self behind three different personas: the military man, the tramp, the bohemian poet.

In many ways the two men are opposites and do not even like each other; yet they are drawn together because they supply a crucial need in each other. To his astonishment the discreet, guarded Victor finds himself talking freely about his life, marriage and art to a man he does not trust at all, while Eric finally reveals his true self and his long-held secret to Victor. This liberates himself from his past and from his masks: having done so, he cannot continue living, since he has effectively murdered his three fabricated selves, and like his father before him he commits suicide. There is something of Conrad's Lord Jim in Eric, a man who has a romantic and heroic conception of himself and who falls at the moment of crisis; but his subsequent life is an attempt to hide from the consequences of his failure. Yet the end of Eric is not revealed until the end of the novel, and then only cryptically.

Another literary parallel that tentatively suggests itself is *Mrs Dalloway*, in which two very different characters briefly cross paths in each other's paths in London one day, when a shell-shocked First World War veteran, on the one hand, and a young, optimistic, middle-class, respectable, middle-aged woman, on the other, are both in London. The two characters are linked by a common theme: the death of a young man. Bailey's use of the novel is repeatedly linked with the death of a young man, and so with Eric's fear of death, as he senses its imminence. He is, of course, excessively exploited, although it could be argued that this is a deliberate device, and the same is true of the attitude of the Golden Virgin of Albert, used in connection with Eric's death. Bailey is careful not to overdo such devices, but there is certainly a danger they will become mannerisms if allowed to proliferate any further.

It goes without saying, but Bailey's vision is pessimistic, but there is a world of difference between the Conradian pessimism and the nihilistic nihilism with which he has been inundated since the hey-

other than Clorissa and Septimus, but for much of the novel Bailey shows them apart, not together, and he therefore intervenes two narrative strands between their meeting at the end of the novel, their second proper encounter two thirds of the way through the book. One strand follows Eric's life with its radical transformations and its revelations of three totally different lifestyles strangely combined in this one man. The other strand follows Victor through a chain of memories, dreams, nightmares and dashed hopes as he wanders in London, revisiting places associated with his childhood.

Like several of Bailey's novels, *Old Soldiers* is characterized by extreme compression in an attempt to produce great poetic intensity. In his second novel, *Trespasses* (1970), Bailey employed an economical technique of intercut monologues to present his main characters, while in his third, *A Distant Presence* (1973), he was even more sparing of words, aiming at a hyper-concentration of linguistic effect.

After the relatively expansive fourth novel, *Peter Smart's Confessions* (1977), *Old Soldiers* marks a return to the brevity and imagistic density of *A Distant Presence*, but without the sense of strain and overcompression which somewhat marred that highly ambitious novel. *Old Soldiers* may not be aspiring so high, but it is more consistently successful. On the first page, for example, Bailey succinctly communicates a great deal of information about Victor, including an important flashback, as well as transporting him from a train arriving at King's Cross to his London hotel. Many novelists would need a chapter, not a page, to accomplish so much. And several chapters could have replaced the space between the penultimate sentence and the final one abruptly announcing Victor's death. Bailey's bold leap is, however, absolutely right and absolutely chilling. He is the least prosy of prose writers, and for all his avoidance of obvious poetic effects he is one of the most genuinely poetic of new novelists.

Bailey's writing is marked by elision, producing an effect that can resemble collage but without the randomness usually associated with the technique. This is evident in the way in which every detail, even the seemingly inconsequential one, is made to count, often preparing for further instances that add up to a pattern of significance. The basic theme, Victor remembers seeing on a wall in 1922, and that "caused his heart to leap" (first page) registers immediately, and eventually develops into a symbol of vitality and possibility (the later jokes about *Nécessité* come as a surprise). The television news of the bombing of Hiroshima, causing death and mutilation, is again carefully placed, since it introduces a different pattern of imagery relating to war and destruction, focused on the death at the Battle of the Somme of Victor's only close friend. And the journey to the grave on a medieval tomb, of the cemetery visited by Victor, and of an old, crumbling, archaic, all connect with the theme of death, established in the first paragraph and culminating in the last. Bailey's use of language makes even more extensive use than in *Peter Smart's Confessions* of repeated words and phrases, which gradually become loaded with implications: "dust" is linked with Victor; "whether the cognac glass is warmed or unwarm" is similarly significant; and the words "bright future" on the last page are especially ironic in the light of "the bright future... bright past" of the first page.

For Bailey's symbolist method, although obvious, is far from being baroque or indulgent. Even the noise of the wind in the trees, which towards the end of the novel is repeatedly linked with the death of a young man, and so with Eric's fear of death, as he senses its imminence, is not excessively exploited, although it could be argued that this is a deliberate device, and the same is true of the attitude of the Golden Virgin of Albert, used in connection with Eric's death. Bailey is careful not to overdo such devices, but there is certainly a danger they will become mannerisms if allowed to proliferate any further.

It goes without saying, but Bailey's vision is pessimistic, but there is a world of difference between the Conradian pessimism and the nihilistic nihilism with which he has been inundated since the hey-

day of Existentialism. Bailey once said of Conrad that no novelist depicts so well the essential isolation of human beings, the way in which we all live alone and die alone; and this is what Bailey also excels in. He exposes the vulnerability at the heart of all individuals, the strategies by which people try to disguise their vulnerability and to protect themselves from the daily assault of reality, including the inevitability of death.

Among the reasons why Bailey writes about old people, and writes about them so well, is that he recognizes how especially exposed they are and how they cannot take refuge in a fantasy world nearly so easily as the young. Eric is such an extraordinary creation because he is an old man still trapped in the fantasy he established for himself when young. Yet if Bailey peels away the deceptions and self-deceptions, the masks and pretences, by which his characters live, he does so with enormous sympathy for their predicament. "Compassion" is an essential word, especially by critics, but it is entirely appropriate to use it about Bailey's presentation of his characters. The love between Victor and his wife is a positive value in a world in which the positives may be rare but are not absent.

Yet there are ways in which Bailey's very restraint works against such positives. To achieve intensity he does make sacrifices, and in deliberately eschewing the richness of character and detail of the traditional realistic novel he is also abandoning possibilities of warmth. He might even be leaving himself open to the charge that he is selling human experience short. bleakness is certainly not all in Bailey, although he has been accused of this, but the reticence and formal concision of this book could give the impression. The Dickensian side of his considerable talent, which was so evident in *Peter Smart's Confessions* and made the first half of that novel a new departure for him, is much more muted here, although *Old Soldiers* does not lack in warmth. Perhaps next time he will again give it full vent.

Playing charades

By Victoria Glendinning

V. S. PRITCHETT:
On the Edge of the Cliff
179pp, Chatto and Windus £4.95,
0 7011 2438 5

These stories are written by a man who seems to be acknowledging how very little any of us know about each other. The physical truth of V. S. Pritchett's characters, on the other hand, is, as always, overwhelming: their bulky presences, awkward limbs and clumsy conversation, the way they speak, as if of a piece, as if described obsessively. "Hair disturbs me", says the narrator of "The Pig Tree", dwelling on the "downy intimate" eyebrows of the married woman he is involved with. Yet the general impression, after reading all the nine stories, is of having been in strangers' houses as an observant guest, listening to conversations about people one does not know, and never being sure which man arrived, or will leave, with which woman. The lever in "The Pig Tree" for example, never really understands the nature of the marriage between Duggie and Sally that he has invaded. "My notion was that Duggie invented me, as he had invented her. I spend my time, she says, inventing Duggie. She invented neither of us."

Similarly in "The Wedding" Mrs Jackson says "A girl is a new being; they have to invent themselves." She is a divorcee who has come back to her home village with an aura of mystery and foreign ideas about her; if she has invented herself, the villagers project their fantasies on her in return. Only in the wordless horseplay at the rural wedding can these fantasies be expressed.

An image or self-image can be destroyed in a trice. In "A Family Man", Barone enjoys her affair with handsome William, his perfect marriage enhancing her picture of him. When William's wife is beautiful, she felt so beautiful

herself that her bones seemed to turn to water." But when William's wife turns up at her flat in a messy dress, bloated and plain, "a green skirt", William changes at once in Barone's mind's eye. "His good looks began to look commonplace and shabby". Married people, she thinks, are "always lying to themselves and forcing you to lie to them."

Barone loves the lie while it lasts, because it increases her own stature. People live by these own smokecreens. In "The Whippersnappers" V. S. Pritchett writes that worship is not love. "To worship is to be put in a trance by an image. In this story, two small businessmen in the wholesale fabrics trade, Lavender and Rees, worship both each other and the portrait of the firm's founder, Lavender's grandfather. Worship and myth keep them going and give their activities dignity, even though the firm and Lavender's marriage are foundering, and though the founder of the firm turns out to be no relation to Lavender at all.

The arrogant little official in "The Vice-Consul" is unworshiped by the belief that he is "the only human being in town". The people who seem to come to grief are those who cannot improvise in this way, and who try to pin down the shifting realities of life.

In "Tea with Bittel" an elderly gentleman takes up a grocer's assistant called Sidney, and the friendship gives pleasure to both lonely souls. Sidney is concerned with sincerity, and in the climate of half-knowledge and projection that the author has built up Sidney's probing seems both pathetic and funny. He has been watching "The Battle of Waterloo" on television. "Do you think the Duke of Wellington was sincere?" he asks Mrs Bittel; and of a picture of her wall, "The man who painted it, was he sincere?" The question is, in itself, unanswerable. This is not a self-questioning, but a question of sincerity, especially when Sidney's friend Rupert turns out to be no good. "I thought he was sincerely, my friend."

The surreality of Sidney's quest for sincerity is echoed in the language V. S. Pritchett uses in his descriptions. So much in these stories is in soft focus that the quick surprises of his style stand out extra sharply. A fig tree in winter, leafless and gnarled, looks like "a chunk of machinery". The mother of the narrator of "The Pig Tree" is getting on in years and her face shows it, but "her nose was young"; the main character of "The Spanish Bed" is a large bachelor, and "in the village it felt to be unnatural for a man of his size to be living alone."

Most writers of fiction seem concerned to rationalize at least some of their characters, explaining to us ourselves, making some reconciling pattern of motive, action, reaction. In Sir Victor's new story (these were all written in the late 1970s) nothing seems to make sense. It is a story of a man of "old" and "young" and women that most fascinates him now, and sexual love and the terrifying mirror it holds out are at the root of most of the stories.

The best of them all is the big story, about Harry, a man in his seventies, living with Rowena, a girl in her twenties. "There are love for old men who are in love with young girls, and the saddest when the young girls are in love with them. It has to be played as a game. Their game is interrupted by Daisy, an old flame of Harry's who describes what she was like to Rowena. "A very conventional-looking middle-aged woman, Daisy is now living with a boy young enough to be her son, and since, as she says, she is a bitch but not a fool, she comes to ask Harry to not want her to stay. She does not want her to stay, she wants to know Rowena: both the idylls could be shattered."

The ingenious charades that enable men and women to love both each other and themselves are pathetic but not always pitiful. The story of Harry and Rowena is told with that certainty of touch that gives knobbly English prose an elegant grace; they are a touching pair.

"What are you thinking about?" she asked without opening her eyes. "He was going to say 'At my age one is always thinking about death,' but he said 'You're

Into the labyrinth of words

By Anthony Thorlby

PAUL DE MAN:
Allegories of Reading
Figural Language in Rousseau, Nietzsche, Rilke and Proust
305pp, Yale University Press, £12.30,
0 300 02322 7

"The question is precisely whether a literary text is about that which it describes, represents, or states," Paul de Man repeats this question, which has become increasingly familiar during the past decade, as he leads us through a maze of ideas and a variety of more or less self-involved and paradoxical discussions (in language) of the still more fundamental question, also confronted here, "whether all language is about language." Often the answers have been confirmed in our line to Russell's homological paradox: namely, that if it is it is not, and if it is not it is. Anglo-Saxon minds are liable then to conclude that the whole approach is wrong or at least unfruitful. But in Europe and now America many linguistically self-conscious minds, linguistically self-conscious minds, have long been ready to believe that we live in a man-made labyrinth of words and should not mistake our verbal landscape for nature.

This book makes us wonder to what extent Rilke, for instance, believed this, or Proust? They may seem not to, in passing, but they apparently assume a more mystical belief in experience, in things, in memories, in "life". Professor de Man is knowingly condescending towards anyone who is taken in by such apparent "poetic announcements", moved by its "existential" thematic reading, that takes the words of the text at their word. His purpose is to show how "such a reading is put in question if one takes the rhetorical structure of the text into account."

The promises asserted by these texts is grounded in a play of language that can only come about because the poet has renounced any claim to extratextual authority. In conformity with a paradox that is inherent in all literature, the poetry gains a maximum of convincing power at the very moment that it abdicates any claim to truth.

Was this, then, Shakespeare's secret too, which Prospero's final abjuration reveals? Professor de Man does not, in fact, analyse the "rhetorical structure" of drama, and it is striking that it is the only form of writing which he does not consider. This is doubtless because theatre cannot be subsumed entirely under the rubric of "reading"; its structure transcends purely rhetorical questions of language, by placing words in a larger context of gesture, mime, and situation. Theatre does provide a "metalinguistic" standpoint from which we hear and see what language is in terms other than those of language alone. It does not have to be argued that the power of Prospero's speech lies in the abdication by Shakespeare (or his poetry) of all claim to truth.

Professor de Man only mentions theatre in the ensuing chapters on Nietzsche, where his interest is drawn to the rhetorical structure of the text. With regard to Nietzsche's style he clearly wishes to warn against the mystification of language improperly used, if promises more than what is still rhetoric. "It allows for two incompatible, mutually self-destructive [sic] points of view, and therefore puts an insurmountable obstacle in the way. In this way also the professor's? Has he not also produced a text, subject to the same limitations as any other? (For instance, that "deconstruction states the fallacy of reference in a necessarily self-referential mode.") What is the "proper", as distinct from either a literal or a figural, use of language, at which he sometimes hints?

Proust, we find, has also engaged in the same self-deceptive play as Nietzsche with rhetorical "substitutions, exchanges and crossings", what are called "substitutive reversals" in Nietzsche's case, but here the reversals are put in circulation by metaphors. "It appears to relate the inner with the outer world." The inner verb here is "appear to".

Professor de Man's analyses of various passages show how the "proximity" between the thing and the idea of the thing fails to pass the test of truth. Proximity is not enough, and Proust's narrative continually reveals that it is no more than "the proximity of certain ideas" which leads to things their significance for us. That is a very loose form of association—mere metonymy, in the ideal of idea and thing which Proust represents as occurring in his privileged moments of total recall and also, metaphorically, in art.

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The second part of the book is devoted entirely to Rousseau, treating the main books in turn and from the same point of view: that of their organization as texts and of the dependence of their project. "Any narrative is primarily the allegory of its own reading." The result, however, is to discover that the very opposite of such synthesis is present.

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**BODLEY
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commentary

The Drylands of tomorrow

By Nicholas Shrimpton

Thee and Me
Lynell Theatre

Philip Martin, whose play *Thee and Me* opened at the Lynell Theatre this week, is an example of an intriguing modern phenomenon: the dramatist who writes far more confidently for radio and television than for the stage. His first considerable success, *Lord Nelson Lives* in Liverpool 8, was once briefly presented in the studio of the Liverpool Playhouse. But this rambling and imaginatively introspective monologue was really a radio play and only worked as such. I listened to it in Liverpool 8 and felt that his hero could be my next-door neighbour. When, a few months later, I saw Philip Martin's conventional stage-play, *A Tide in the Affairs of Women*, I didn't believe a word.

One reason for this puzzling inconsistency is Martin's exaggerated sense of the intellectual profundity of which drama in the theatre must aspire. His best work for the airwaves, such as the uproarious *Gingsters* series on BBC television, has been cheerfully casual. Though *Gingsters* had points to make about life in the immigrant communities of contemporary Britain, it kept its messages firmly concealed beneath a playful and parodic surface. In

the theatre, by contrast, he believes in confronting great issues with daunting directness. *A Tide in the Affairs of Women* is a problem play about the murder of an old lady by a female urban guerrilla. The stiff debates which preceded this act attempted the simultaneous elucidation of the theory of surplus value and the rights of women. *Thee and Me*, equally ambitious, is a parallel set sixty years in the future about the struggle between individualism and the state.

Martin's vision of the year 2040 is of a sultry world in which the sun has burnt through the earth's ozone layer. Even mad dogs and Englishmen must now avoid the ultra-violet rays of noon and the totalitarian state controls the few surviving sources of water. But in the sun-baked hills of Lancashire (a neat reversal of the traditional joke about Mancunian rainfall) is one of the play's few lighter touches: an isolated community preserves its freedom. Jack Gromer marched out into the Drylands some twelve years before the opening of the play. He found a neglected spring and shelter from the sun. Now he wishes to perpetuate his independent attitudes by marrying his son to the daughter of a fellow-rebel.

Though the first five minutes of Michael Rudman's production of *Thee and Me* are inaudible, thanks to some over-enthusiastic drumming and chanting, it slowly becomes apparent that we are witnessing the neoprimative fertility rites which mark the marriage of young Will

Gromer and Molly Stiggins. Unfortunately these latter-day children of nature, for all their earthy cries of "Plough it straight, Will lad", cannot seem to get the rites right. Will is impotent and the marriage remains embarrassingly infertile. Jack promptly seeks an alternative outlet for his dynastic ambitions. His daughter, Sal, is courted by Molly's brother, Jeremiah, a sullen rustic whose characteristic response to female intransigence is the dark observation that "he's broken horses". Those horses, however, constitute an irresistible dowry. Sal's objections are swept aside and the lights go down for the interval on scenes of fatherly triumph and filial dismay.

The second half could hardly be more different. From being an everyday story of country folk *Thee and Me* suddenly becomes a political debate. Through the gloom stalks an agent of the dreaded British State. He pretends to be an exile and works on the family's laborious irrigation scheme. But his real purpose is to stir up revolt. He teaches Will to read (starting with such useful words as "kiss", "propaganda", "Gromer", "daughter", "title" and offers lessons in elementary Marxism to all and sundry. Eventually he and father come face to face. The intruder denounces liberty and selfishness, declaring that only a centralized state can correct the blunders of past generations. Gromer responds with some decidedly half-cocked arguments for individualism, a creed of which he, a

tyrannical patriarch, is in any case most inappropriately representative. The fecklessness with which ideas are deflected proves, however, to be of little consequence for play eventually abandons plot and reverts to the psychosexual concerns of its opening scenes. Sight of somebody arguing with father alerts Will to the source of his personal problem. This is, of course, our old friend the Oedipus Complex and he disposes of it in a suitably direct and prime manner.

That such dubious stuff can be staged at all is, I think, a remarkable tribute to the skills of Michael Rudman and his cast. Hong somehow manages to serve his dignity as Jeremiah Stiggins, a part which calls for little beyond a series of high-chested snarls. Leonard Maguire has more of a chance as the patriarchal Jack Gromer and in his marvellous best of it, but acting can save a play in which the language is so ludicrously judged. Don Warrington, as the intruder, at one point very properly swallows the line "Your father's a field reason and grant me a hand". Leonard Maguire, as Jeremiah, is required to deliver at volume the words "Sal and Dad in top field? Oh just hope I don't have to use pole to prise 'em apart". With dialogue like that kept expecting Seth Starbuckers come on stage and wrestle all characters in subduing. Perhaps they should retitile it *Hot Comfort Farm*?

The one point in the film where sense of loss was allowed to become overt.

The details of Lowell's life are important, not just because he is so much about his private life as in his poetry, but because he is so much about his public life. Lowell's life is a series of public events, whether opposing war in Vietnam, campaigning for Eugene McCarthy, or more important, in presenting himself as an existentialist hero who reflects the tensions of contemporary history. Lowell's life is a series of public events, whether opposing war in Vietnam, campaigning for Eugene McCarthy, or more important, in presenting himself as an existentialist hero who reflects the tensions of contemporary history.

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Snapshots of a master

By Christopher Butler

Robert Lowell: A Life Study
BBC TV

Since Robert Lowell was a great poet, and the relationship of his work to experience peculiarly direct, we are going to want to know a great deal about the world he lived in. Biography and memoir—critically worthy, exhaustively factual, or merely anecdotal—will be primary resource; but the look of Lowell's world can be simulated only by the camera. Though all such images falsify to some degree as they record, David Cheshire's film (shown last Friday on BBC2) was nevertheless a distinguished attempt to combine simple biography, poetry reading, and original testimony. The last, particularly from Peter Taylor and Mary McCarthy, who are distinguished authors in their own right, gave a sense of Lowell as a man who was loved, and whose wit and resilience were enjoyed. Taylor in particular managed to reflect Lowell's peculiar mixture of irony and compassion in his account of a difficult friend who, in 1949, first showed signs of madness in his presence.

Of course this matter of madness had to be partly accounted for, and many will have been cruelly and fruitlessly on the alert for signs of eccentricity as they watched Lowell in interview or reading his poems. But the film tactfully offered no explanations, and limited itself in this respect to the accounts of witnesses. Thus Grey Gervais's anecdote of the Boston police, who were made by Lowell to sit and remove him to McLean's hospital, was both funny and moving (though curiously undercut by the romantic candlelight and echoing baroque hall in which it was filmed).

Gervais's remark of "Walking in the blue" was the only one unaccompanied by visual imagery of an illustrative kind. As always, the roving camera is a distraction from the poetry. It accompanies his ungainly questing to those who knew the poet, who were not those who don't. Thus Colleen Seale's statue, "as lean as a compass needle", and with "an angry, worm-like vigilance", a greyhound's gentle taunt, "For the Union Dead", was blandly interrupted while the poet's son read, as were the Quaker

graveyard at Nantucket, Caslestown and so on. Some of these juxtapositions were nevertheless worthwhile since Lowell's poetry is so deeply implicated in the visual. We need to know his Boston and New York (and London) far more than we need to know the precise shop in which the Prince bought the Golden Bowl for Maggie. Elsewhere, though, the juxtapositions were far less satisfactory. The accounts of Lowell's conscientious objection, for example, were inevitably accompanied by shots of bombs falling on Germany.

The television biographer is, of course, at the mercy of news film and family snapshots (and the for the home, and testifying to meticulous research). He is also at the

A romp through sylvan Switzerland

By Elissa Durwood

Messidor
Academy Cinema

Aleix Tanner's importance to Swiss cinema cannot be overstated. His first film, *Nice Time* (1957), was made in collaboration with Claude Goretta in London. (Both men were born in 1929, and are from Geneva.) This partnership went on to establish "Groupe Cino". In 1968, which he founded, Tanner's first two films, *Swiss Time* and *Swiss Time*, were made in collaboration with Goretta and which included several other directors and which was meant to lend force to his dealings with Swiss television. Besides his efforts toward better film-making conditions in Switzerland, Tanner's own films have greatly helped to put Swiss cinema on the map. His second feature-length film, *Charles Morit* on *Vie* (1969), was the first Swiss film in twenty years to gain wide circulation abroad. His next film, *Swiss Time* (1971), was a huge box-office success in Switzerland. Tanner is generally thought to be responsible for having generated the current wave of New Swiss Cinema.

His most recent film, which has just opened at the Academy Cinema, is *Messidor*. It is about two girls, Jeanne, a student, and Marie, a shop assistant, both about nineteen

years old, who take off hitch-hiking for a few days in the country. Like *Le Difficile de l'Amour* this is a film full of the tension of options and possibilities. Marie, the country girl, is inarticulate and physical (she even has a farmer's tan); Jeanne, the city girl, relies greatly on her own verbal acumen—Marie remarks, "You city slickers always figure out ways to get by." When they are hitch-hiking the girls take a ride from two men who then drive into the woods and try to rape Jeanne. Not able to fight them off, Marie picks up a rock and bashes the would-be rapist's head, apparently killing him. Afterwards she never mentions a word about it. Later when they are barbing in a pond, Marie takes great pleasure in watching Jeanne, but when Jeanne suggests they make love Marie protests to find the idea totally disgusting. "It's her inability to put expression to strong feelings," Marie embodies what Tanner calls "the small, unconscious sense of prophesy."

It is Jeanne who gives a name to the girls' adventure, and indeed to the film. After a few days on the road they have run out of money and Marie suggests they return home. Jeanne suggests "The name—that they carry on together as far as possible." Until one of them drops dead. When they are stopped by a policeman Jeanne pretends to be Marie and Marie to be Jeanne. Tanner's explanation to Marie that "Messidor" was a German month on the calendar before the French Revolution.

As in other of his films, and indeed in the traditional Swiss cinema, Tanner uses the country side to punctuate and structure his story. The dominant image of *Messidor* is a countryside chopped up by roads. In the opening sequence the camera moves from dense forest to motorway and then gradually works its way up to a aerial shot of snow-capped mountains, laying the route the girls take. When Jeanne and Marie are engaged in their sylvan romp the camera moves in a slow left-to-right pan, cuts to a black screen, and repeats this several times.

In contrast, views of the motorway tend to be rapid cuts from a scenic view to a close-up of a car. James Monaco has said that "Tanner uses landscape as a sort of metaphor for the spiritual state of his characters." Fade-outs to the happy setting sun—Marie and Jeanne keep trying for that final ride off into the sunset.

Like *Le Milieu du Monde* this film takes place in the "middle of the world", Switzerland, but there can be no argument about visually. The general accessibility. Visually, the stretches of motorway "Godspeed" advertisements and Chevrons dot the landscape. The long shot of a road leading into the distance echoes many of the film's certain business of playing an unfulfilled life, but makes no promises.

Maximal minimalism

By Richard Calvocoressi

Ellsworth Kelly:
Hayward Gallery

After the scramble of the Thirties exhibition, which to the weary visitor must have assumed the horrifying proportions of a labyrinthine obstacle course, the Hayward Gallery has rid its insides of partitions, cubicles, showcases and odd unexplained corners in order to make room for a display of recent paintings and sculpture by the American abstract artist Ellsworth Kelly (until April 7). Naked and for once unashamed of its wide empty spaces, the gallery has never looked better, fully justifying the big-thinking and optimism of the 1960s which brought it into being. The Hayward was built to show works such as Kelly's which, because of their size and often irregular geometric forms, as much as their employment of large flat areas of single, intense colour (less so in paintings after about 1974), require generous breathing space.

The effect is exhilarating. Kelly was closely involved with the hanging of the exhibition. Although commentators usually see his work as falling naturally into groups or series, he himself does not view things so schematically and has gone for a flexible, imaginative arrangement.

The exhibition has come from Amsterdam minus the first three works in the catalogue, so that only two paintings from the 1960s are included—one of them the dynamic "Red Green" triptych of 1968, the first thing you see as you enter the gallery. In what is therefore a tense, well-spaced, themes and preoccupations are built into a series, and certain paintings are hung in a sequence according to such considerations as external shape, internal structure, colour and tone. But, as Kelly has been to point out, his paintings, partly because of their insistence on contour, partly because of the formal rhythms they contain or imply, relate more to surrounding space than to each other. And several of them in a room, it is the contrast, not the generic similarities, which make the strongest impact.

The small change of dissidence

By Michael Scammell

Protest
Olivier Theatre

Anyone wishing to know what it feels like to be a dissident writer in Eastern Europe today should hurry along to the National Theatre on March 5 or 6 to see Václav Havel's one-act play *Protest* before it disappears into oblivion after only six performances.

Havel, of course, should know what he is talking about. Ever since his first protests in 1969 over the crackdown on writers that occurred in the Prague Spring, Havel has been a dissident. In other words, this act of uncharacteristic dissent during the Prague Spring is inspired by self-interest, and he is particularly grateful when Václav Havel from the Czech people and Czech culture, his spokesman for the Charter 77 group, his first arrest, trial and suspended sentence for "damaging the state's reputation abroad", his membership of VONS (Committee to Defend the Unjustly Persecuted) and finally his sentence of four and a half years (at October for "subversion", since when he languished in Hranice Prison near Ostrava).

Protest, as its title suggests, is about the small change of a dissident writer's life. It is a routine protest for out of the "actually" protest. But Havel is too experienced a writer to indulge in heroics. Rather, he takes us behind the scenes of a cultural life in an embattled country. Václav, a dissident writer, has been invited to the first of Havel's "essays" (Havel, also a writer, who has

The inventiveness of Kelly's vocabulary is astonishing: the slightest change of emphasis which makes a curve sharper or softer, for instance, will alter the whole weight and balance of a picture, creating a tension between shapes that might be completely absent from a work of near-identical appearance. One would not have thought it possible for an artist using elementary geometric forms, presented singly or in combinations of two or more, and an equally restrictive colour scheme (often relegated to simple encounters of black and white, positive and negative), to extract such a range of emotional responses from the viewer.

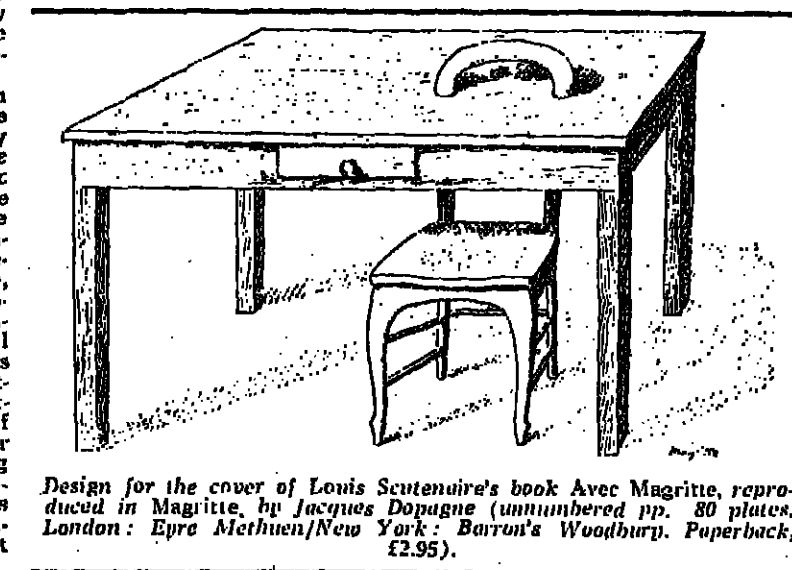
It is the unpredictability and vitality of Kelly's highly individual achievement which more than anything distinguishes it from the ordered world of Minimal art, though in other respects there exists a shared concern which can probably be traced back to Duchamp: the idea that a work of art is neither a painting nor sculpture in the traditional, Miesian sense, but an object, a thing in itself. "Unassigned, anonymous" (the epithets are Kelly's). The artist's attempt to make his own person a part of his own creation has been an important feature of much twentieth-century art. In the 1960s,

Kelly's name was associated with the "hard-edge" school of American painting whose experiments produced works that were in marked contrast to those of the Abstract Expressionists a decade earlier. In the latter the artist's "self", through emphatic bodily gesture translated into paint marks on canvas, becomes the principal subject of the painting; the edge of abstraction, on the other hand, is smoothly and evenly painted, almost as if machine-made, and is generally cooler in terms of psychological charge. (These characteristics are reinforced by their author's box outlines, and by the fact that several of them are made up of two or more canvases joined together, a practice which softens the hardness of the edge and ensures an interesting change of surface texture. It is not possible to read his paintings as one would either a Pollock with its equal value given to all areas of the canvas—what critics have dubbed his "all-over" quality—or a typical Rothko, whose coloured fields the spectator can contemplate from a central, stationary position. Although he recalls Pollock in the environmental

dimension of his art, Kelly's paintings do not engulf the viewer in the same way: they are disjoined—perhaps best glimpsed, as the artist himself suggests, out of the corner of one's eye.

The recent unpainted metal reliefs which, like the quiet grey paintings of 1975, were begun after a long period of using colour, indicate that Kelly has travelled even further towards total self-effacement, though, as Barbara Rose remarks in her catalogue essay, "the reliefs are ironically more painterly in their textual variegations than the paintings themselves". But they proclaim with equal honesty and directness their status as objects. "The form of my painting is the content", Kelly has written, and it is for this reason that he so admired the late "Nymphs" paintings of Monet which he saw on a visit to Giverny in 1952. Kelly's sensibility is more European than American; he spent several formative years (1948-54) in Paris, where he developed a considerable respect for the work of Brancusi (not unexpectedly) and the Arps, especially Sophie, and became interested in the large-scale use of colour in some of Le Corbusier's buildings. He thinks that the size of his paintings derives not from Abstract Expressionism but from the huge nineteenth-century French canvases which he saw in the Louvre.

Kelly's art offers an equivalence for one's experience of the visible world. Juxtapositions of form and space, contrasts of light and shade—the long curve of a snow-covered hillside against dark trees—and a repertoire of flat fragmentary shapes which, far one reason or another, have stuck in the artist's mind: sections of doors or windows, the façades of buildings, scraps of paper found in the street—all make their way, abstracted and distilled, into his work. The exhibition contains a number of beautiful drawings, including two from the late 1950s, which record Kelly's initial reaction to such visual stimuli. They, and the paintings and sculpture to which they relate, are striking proof that abstract art has lost none of the vigour with which it began its noisy, troubled life nearly seventy years ago.



Design for the cover of Louis Scutenaire's book *Avec Magritte*, reproduced in Magritte, by Jacques Dupuy (unnumbered pp. 80 plates, London: Eyre Methuen/New York: Barron's Woodbury, Paperback, £2.95).

Oxford
University PressModernizing
Shakespeare's
Spelling

With Three Studies of the
Text of Henry V
Stanley Wells
and Gary Taylor

Edited texts of Shakespeare and his contemporaries have been presented in modernized spelling for centuries, yet there has been no serious attempt to face the problems posed by this process and to formulate a set of rational principles. On his appointment as General Editor of the forthcoming Oxford edition of Shakespeare, which is to be in modern spelling, Dr Wells therefore regarded this as an important preliminary task. His findings are here printed in advance of the edition itself. £9

Sheridan Le Fanu
and Victorian
Ireland

W. J. McCormack

In this first biography of Sheridan Le Fanu, the author combines literary criticism with a searching study of Victorian Irish society, drawing on previously unpublished letters, intimate diaries, and fragmentary drafts. The author details Le Fanu's experience of Irish rural violence and his career as a newspaper proprietor, and also propounds a radical reinterpretation of Anglo-Irish literature as a whole. Illustrated £12.50 13 March

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by Terence Irwin

The *Gorgias* is a vivid introduction to central problems of moral and political philosophy. In his notes to his translation Dr Irwin discusses the historical and social context of the dialogue, expands and criticizes the arguments, and tries above all to suggest the questions a modern reader ought to raise about Plato's doctrines. £10.50 paper covers £5.95 Clarendon Plato Series

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Documents of the
Puritan Revolution
1625-1660

Samuel Rawson Gardiner

This paperback reprint replaces the boards edition. First published in 1888, and since then twice revised, this collection has long served as a basis for the study of the constitutional and political history of the period. Third edition, paper covers £4.95

Cannibals

Haiti

think lecturers and their pupils able to make up their own minds? Or does he think that they should be protected from interpretations different from his own?

GEORGE BERNARD.
11 Percy Building, University
College Annexe, Staverton Road,
Oxford.

and pres
more th

book was substantially completed by the autumn of 1976" (page viii). Quite properly Professor Elton says that "it is only fair to judge Williams's achievement as representing the stock of knowledge accumulated up until a few years ago" but these charitable inclinations do not stop him from berating Dr. Williams again and again for not having kept up with what (in the

century
by the tr

works of historical interpretation do not lose their value in the way that (I am told) law or physics textbooks do by the standards of this review. Professor Elton's own *England under the Tudors*, published in 1955, is "inescapably out of date" but I think it is still worth reading. Nor is it very helpful to say to the author of a general survey that "too many relevant matters are not yet ready for a summation up". They never are: or that principle no history would ever be written. All historical writing is in a sense an invention.

Professor Elton also tends to see the 1536 Statute as an "error" what others might see as a reasonable but difference opinion. He illustrates his criticisms of Dr. Williams' view of the "caveat" by pointing to the Williams's statement that the 1530 Statute of Wills repeated the 1536 Statute of Uses. Yet given that Dr Williams does not refer to this in the context of a discussion of the intricacies of the true construction of laws, and that the Statute rather in relation to royal finance and to the demands of the Pilgrimage of Grace in 1536, it does not seem inadequate. Moreover, in his article, "The genesis of the statute"

of 1450," E. W. Ives wrote that in 1540, a Statute of Wills was passed which repealed much of the Statute of Uses. Ives suggested that the political and social consequences of the statute of uses were entirely reversed (English Historical Review, lxviii [1967], pp. 695-6).

Another instance of Professor Elton's tendency to see alternative interpretation as an error appears in his suggestion that, while Dr. Williams emphasizes the continuities in Tudor government "the standards in effect by a concept"

• • •

Professor Elton ends his review by attempting to harness Williams's conclusion that Tudor government was in large part created to his own belief that Tudor government was "essentially client". But in so doing Professor Elton appears to me to have failed to grasp the central thesis of the

ment, PC
g House
London
" Autho

perspectives that, this insight, and a new mannerism, the foundation of the establishment of a reign in Elizabeth's reign to establish the continuing national sense of the nobility that William's book deserves to widely read.

A misreading error is very probable. If the "Hand D" portion of *Sir Thomas More* is Shakespeare's, we know that his "w" could be mistaken for "r" and his "d" for "e", and that he spelt "God"

Henry V

by the two forms "ayle" and "ile". I think the printer's copy had "by ow god a death": he misunderstood the first word, misread the next one, and then changed the whole phrase by changing the fourth word and adding the comma.

It will be remembered that in *Henry IV, Part I* (V i 126) Prince Hal tells Falstaff, "Wily, thou owest God a death," and Falstaff observes "Tis not due yet: I would be loath to pay him before his day," and as exchange which strengthens the case for the proposed emendation, as does Peebles' valiant protestation (death in battle again being in question), "By my troth, I care not; a man can die but once; we owe God a death" (*Henry IV, Part 2, III ii 228-30*).

T. W. CRAIK
Department of English, Univer-
sity of Durham, Durham DH1 3JL

that be-
course

STELLA MARY NEWTON is the author of *Renaissance Theatre Costume, 1575*.

E. C. RILEY is Professor of Spanish at the University of Edinburgh. His *Suma Cervantina*, with J. B. Ayala-Arce, was published in 1973.

MICHAEL SCAMMILL is the Editor of *Index on Censorship*.

NICHOLAS SHIRNIPSON is Lecturer in English at the University of Liverpool.

ANDREW SINCLAIR's books include *Prohibition, 1962*, and *The Facts of the Case of E. A. Poe, 1973*.

GEORGE STEINER's recent books include *Heidegger and On Difficulty and Other Essays*, both 1978.

STUART SUMTERLAND is Professor of Experimental Psychology at the University of Sussex.

DAVID SWERTMAN is a BBC radio critic and a winner in the recent Poetry Society competition.

LAURIE TAYLOR is the author of *Dance and Society, 1971*.

CHARLES THOMAS is Professor of Cultural Studies at the University of Exeter.

ANTHONY THORLEY's books include *The Romantic Movement, 1967*.

ANDREW WATERMAN's new collection of poems, *After the Wall*, will be published next month.

ANTHONY WELLS-COLE is Senior Assistant Keeper at Leeds City Art Gallery.

Sharp
the a
West

the one that was really beautiful
the one that had been, most praised
by Mr Ruskin.

—E. M. Forster, *A Room
With a View*, Chapter 1

2. Our moods are apt to be
with their images which we
each other like the angelic
pictures of a dore ; and in cer-
states of dull fatiguesness Dor-
all her life continued to see
vastness of St Peter's, the
bronze canopy, the excited in-
in the attitudes and garments of
prophets and evangelists, the
mosaics above, and the red deep
which was being hung for Christ
spreading itself everywhere in
disease of the retina.

—George Eliot,
Middlemarch, Chapter 1

3. You ask me where I
am going to
I'm either passing through Italy
my way to the
or, to put the matter a little
with
passing through Hell on my
way to
—George Byron,
Ville Sallier

historical locating, never by having resort in a scientific work to such compromised concepts as "canibalism".

PETER HULME.

Sir—Rodney Needham (January 25), analysing *The Man-eating Mountains* of W. Arens, rightly points to the "hundreds of Sumatran as fumed cannibals." By "cannibals" he means people who include cannibalism in discussions with outside culture making the practice part of past or present history whether truth or myth.

As an anthropologist adopted in the Parade ("Slobberer") clan, I lived with Lulu Batuk on the shores of Lake Toba most of 1970.

I was told by Batara Sangit, a leader of eminence and author of a volume on Batak history (*Sjarah Batak*, 1938), when the Dutch missionary linguist J. van Duijn came to Lake Toba in 1818, he was offered human flesh in return for hospitality. He refused and was scolded. He might be able to spare Batak, but if he would not eat human food, he was not a proper Batak.

When I returned from Sumner to Los Angeles, several of my *courant* colleagues assured me that cannibals could not exist, without Arens's book on the mythical nature of cannibalism. My rejoinder was that there is something stronger than folklore as evidence. Not long ago, an unmarried woman and her unborn child were killed and eaten by a father, the child was eaten by the father's child, and nine of his consanguineal relatives. They ate the woman's heart, expecting to become invulnerable to prosecution; their trip to prison in 1973 led to conviction and imprisonment of the actual murderers.

chemicals as alcohol (of whatever quality), would surely be foul beyond redemption.

Charles Lamb's well-known suggestion of dressing only milk-fed infants for the pot was, perhaps, wiser from the epicurean standpoint than he knew.

pork. I suspect the taste of pork, witness the Melanesian Pidgin English term for human flesh, *long-pink*.

Sir,—I hardly know whether to laugh or weep over the correspondence on Edward Thomas's metrical audacity. So far only John Lucas (February 1) has quoted the first line of "As The Team's Head-Brass" correctly, by hyphenating "Head-brass", though that does not save him from creating new problems.

I wish Donald Davie would explain his explanation (February 1) that saying the first two lines of the poem are metrically audacious is not implying that they are incorrect.

not implying that they are irregular. What is metre, if it has no rules, and are we now to consider obedience to rules daring?

Anyhow, being himself talks of
Themselves', handling of the penta-
meter', if we are to talk of penta-
meters, we must assume a 'norma-
tive line' with a regular pattern. But
we must assume no more, as we do
if we proceed to spondee, anapest,
virtual spondee and trochaic
thrusts. The only possible scan-
sion of the lines is:

As the team's head-brass flushed/
out on the turn
The lov/ers dis/appeared into/the

The lines are therefore regular. Of
course the scansion tells us little
about how they are to be read aloud,
which is what interests your corres-

ponents. That is chiefly determined by the need to make them intelligible, and hence by such rules as there are of pronunciation and intonation. Lucas rightly implies that there must be more than two degrees of stress, which is all your other correspondents allow, but his system only allows him to show

By Eric Korn

years, Blair's *Grave* with Blake illustrations ("First edition with fine impressions of the plates, N. 1. A few copies only left of this edition") is certainly a snip at £136.60. But Hunter's *Lautner*—which also has Blake plates—at forty guineas is emphatically not: five years ago you could still find a copy for this price. Someone once calculated that what you would have bought for 50 pence in 1623 would be rich; but if you put it in 5 per cent compound interest you'd be a mega-millionaire.

Meanwhile rebellion is flaring in school, scout and church jubilee year, though not in the book market. If you're going to ask prices like this for a (seventy-five pence for a well produced biography of Melba, probably in print at a fiver), "you've mar-

business charging admission." To someone else I explained carefully that a review copy of an American spook novel was priced at £2 because one had only to go down the road and get £2.97 for it. A bystander noted the address and pinpointed the book, ("The price of books," explained one lady in a careful-loud voice, "is always fly-
pence.") Publishers deserve all our sympathy and understanding in these troublous times.

I've been glancing idly through BUCOP, the British Union Catalogue of Periodicals, to see if they are keeping up with the rush of new literary periodicals. By no means though it comes hot from the micromchan four times a year is still taken a couple of years before the two thousand-odd new magazines, journals, periodicals and supplements that come into British libraries annually are properly accessed and kitted out with an internationalist stamp. But the old and the new approved abbreviation. Some skill and subtlety are exercised here. *Products Of India* becomes *Prur India* instead of *Prod India*, which might be taken for an offensive slogan like *Wake Up, England, no ruler, nor slave, Mind Your Own Business* abbreviated to *MYOB*.

They come, from far and near the *Rav Invest. Cent. Invest. Fess*

comes, unexpectedly, from the French Post Office. Some forward-looking pragmatist has looked at the problems of daily publishing, printing, binding and distributing many kilotons of directories each year, and has concluded that it would be cheaper to kit out the entire French population with a small computer, a television set and a visual display unit on which the required number will magically appear.

This is not speculation, projection, nor pious intent. Manufacture and distribution of the directories for animals will, we are told, begin at once. This may make life difficult for Luddites and for bumbling individuals who can't remember if they are a digitus with one or two, but are sure they're either Coronet Road or Jubilee Grove or Abdication Avenue; but then life has always been difficult for people who use the directories: give us short shrift and inquiries operators no shrift at all.

So there will be some ten million French homes with the capacity for receiving unlimited quantities of verbal information on a VDU. How long before another forward-looking pragmatist does his sums and offers us a price tag in francs and centimes on this year's model, then maybe on the next generation of PTT-computers (or compététreurs)? And how long before publishers are discussing the videotexta rights? And how long after that before books are priced in francs and centimes for antiquaries? It could be the end of French letters as we know them.

* * *

Wandering restlessly through the Wadon underground and not able to train but the stations which should be stately pleasure domes and are instead horrid irrational ramazes, aimless blind alleys and mangleling gutters, that twist and climb and sidestep to avoid the rigors of a snuffling furtive Mrs. Tiggy-winkle.

wide corridors that may by smug serendipity lead to an underground council chamber, an exit, a hidey-hole, a store-cupboard or even, on a good day, a platform — I have often puzzled over the identity of

head: because that is how "head-
brass" is pronounced with the stress
on "head" rather than "brass";
but it must not have as much stress
as *teams*; unless it is thought
especially important that it is this
rather than some other brass that
flashes;

out: because I agree with Lucas in thinking Thomas may well have meant the intonation of *out on the turn* to be echoed by that of *into the wood* in the next line, and *into* is normally stressed on the first syllable.

JAMES OGDEN.
Department of English, The University College of Wales, Aberystwyth Dyfed SY23 2AY

Or as Topsell calls him (*History of Four-footed Beasts*, 1608) "The Mole or Want", (So what we call a little gentleman in black velvet, country folk think of as a long felt want.) Topsell quotes Isaiah, as translated by Munster: "In that day shall a man cast away his goods of silver and gold into the holes of Moles and Bats. . . . By S. Jerom it

هذه في الله

Asking for an apocalypse

By George Steiner

THOMAS BERNHARD

Vor dem Ruhestand
Eine komödie von deutscher Seele
121pp. DM 10.
3 518 02141 9

Der Stimmenimitator
179 pp. DM 20.
Frankfurt: Suhrkamp

Thomas Bernhard's reputation has always stood high. In such fictions as *Amoris* and *Korrektur* (a bleak fantasitication on the person of Wittgenstein), critics and the public saw, justly, the original tone of the most uncompromising vision in the postwar Austrian and German novel. From his earliest tale onward, Bernhard created a compelling world of his own: there of the desolate forests, moribund hamlets and stony heights of upper Austria, a world centred on a detested, spectral Salzburg, site of Bernhard's personal Calvary and the site of the Allied bomb-bombardments. To this terrain, partly topographically exact, partly allegorical, Bernhard's lapidary prose and idiosyncratic economy of style gave a grand, coherent shape. Comparison with Kafka was obvious and by no means disparate.

Looking back, one recalls that there were automatisms in these earlier works, that Thomas Bernhard's austere virtuosity and ability to enforce a claustrophobic logic on narration even in his briefest

Posthumous peepshows

By Robin Buss

DANIEL BOULANGER :
La Dame de cœur
 185pp.
Le Gouverneur Polygame
 163pp.
 Paris : Gallimard.

Both of these short novels open with a death and then go on to examine the posthumous influence of the person who has died. Zoé, the fortune-teller of *La dame de coeur*, predicts that she will die on a Wednesday, and does so, bequeathing her rascals and crystal-ball to her niece Marthe. Marthe feels ill-equipped to take on the mantle: she is too young

to come to preposterous life again
in Dan Quixote. Once more Chan-

Bernhard's conviction that the world
can only be improved if it is
abolished:

Alle Wege führen unweigerlich
in die Perversität
und in die Absurdität
Wir können die Welt nur verbessern
wenn wir sie abschaffen

This may be so. It may be necessary for a serious writer to say no and to say so again. But the hostages he ought to give to such apocalyptic fluency must be those of self-challenging form. Comparison with Canetti is instructive. There is more than a touch of the man Kien in the persona and rhetoric of the *Worldimprover*. But Canetti's *Auto-da-fé* has an inventive grandeur and risk wholly absent from Bernhard's monologues of loathing.

Published in 1978, *Der Stille* (The Silent) or "The Voice-mime") is slight, if made up of sketches, some less than a paragraph long, of persons and places, fictive and real. Some of these miniatures are based on incidents, such as the arctic expedition of the daily press; others are somnambular travels to Rome or London. There are notations of Hansun and Thomas Mann. A few always in Bernhard the language has a laconic but uncanny loquacity. No one, except Kafka, has been so brief and less. But often the transparency in these sketches lends to their portentous ordinariness:

Noch Jahre, nachdem unsere Mutter gestorben war, hatte die Post an sie adressierte Briefe zugestellt. Die Post hatte ihn Tod nicht zu Kenntnis genommen.

End of complete text. It would be a severe loss if Thomas Bernbach had no more than this to tell us.

it, and seems to adapt easily to changes in length. It is only when one has finished one of his novels that the episodes in it appear, in reflection, not much different from a chain of short stories linked by a single set of characters and the

One chapter in *Le Gouvernement Polygame*, in particular, stands out in this way. In it, Governor Pigeon decides on his next move by throwing a dart at the map of France: it lands on the town where he has already settled. This omen comes as no great surprise to us, since we have known it. Chapter One that he was already dead.

As we soon learn, this particular scene might have been photographed for the Windmill Theatre Polytechnic, 'at 93, plays host to women of his provincial town and dresses them and entrances' with stories of his dubious past. He adores them, and the love to be adored. The stories cannibalism and native chief that he tells his favourite but not

any one, excepting the
enough to convince us that the
more, than a gentle tribute to
tarin de Tarascon. Though
haunts the streets of Saint-
tossing his hat in the air and
ing "Vive les dames!" every
lous husbands come to accept
he favours, rather than those
their interests. They must
that, like a good short-story
he gets his kicks not from
activity, but from leaning back
enjoy the spectacle of a play
skillfully set up and tastefully
used.

Roasting

There is a climate of failure,
clouds imploded like useless chimney stacks,
while on the beach the sandworms
put out spaghetti for the neighbours
though no one eats.
A lazy length of hauser can't spell
away from the names of Allah correctly
and there's the sinking feeling that comes
from seeing the lifeboat trucks going on and on
into the water, tramlines to Atlantis.

Like the bored teenagers on the promenade
the sea too keeps trying to run away,
off to London and the bright lights,
but always failing, failing, failing.
Always pulling back at the last moment,

David Sweetman

Or convien che Illicona per me versi,
e Urania m'aiuti col suo coro
forti cose a pensar mettere in versi.
(Now must Helicon pour forth for me
and Urania help me with her
choir to put in verse things hard
for thought. Dante, *Purgatorio*,
XXIX, translated by John D. Sinclair.)

also clear from their published writings that both Jones and Winnicott, like all psychanalysts, knew that these ordinary matters could express themselves in rather complicated—one might say, extraordinary—ways, some that result in defensiveness and distortion, some at least struggling towards real engagement and enjoyment.

things that are otherwise difficult to come by: those things hard for thought ("forti cose a pensar") which Dante believed only the Muses—some power beyond the reach of his conscious mind—could help him to put into verse. I shall proceed by way of a few particular examples, but I hope that in so doing I may throw a little light on more general questions. One of these is the question of why the making and reading of the *Divine Comedy*

I must first indicate some self-imposed limitations, in relation to both method and material. I certainly shall not attempt a psycho-analytical approach to any particular work of art, much less the writer himself. Such attempts, even when made by the professionally qualified, seem to me hazardous, and can be the basis of the unqualified and possibly be disastrous. What can be done in this respect, is to point to me, to uncover unresolvable conflicts and obsessive functions in "works" that are in some way flawed, that do not quite come off in its sense, or the works studied by Morris Fagot, *The Death of a Clerk*; but whether they come off or not is a matter for the

practised reader, not for the analyst as such. Second, apart from the evident necessity for vigorous selection, there are whole classes of poems which as it were exclude themselves from this inquiry. One class consists of put us—mean-
ing poems—where the latent or

By L. C. Knights

by the greatest poets are enormous because of the sheer scope of their undertaking: think of the *Divine Comedy*, or *King Lear*. And even in short lyric poems there is an elusiveness in the inspiration that the poet wants to capture. The originating intuition may come to the poet in something completely non-verbal, in, for example, what Nadezhda Mandelstam, referring to

her husband's methods of composition, speaks of as "a musical phrase ringing insistently in the ears; a first inchoate," a "nugget of harmony in the recesses of [the poet's] mind," and the "muscle of the completed poem—including the counterpoint, the rhythm, corresponding to the pulsations of energy in its obscure origins—that conveys so much of its non-periphrastic meaning." And this applies equally to poems whose original source is quite different from musical phrase—imagery, counterpoint in the ears," as with Mandelstam. I have already referred to Ben Jonson, who often—in vocabulary, word order, syntax—comes as near to prose as a good poet can. But when Jonson, at his best as a lyric poet, he obtains the effect—hardly to be denied, it seems to me—of music, it is, makes available that part of his meaning that cannot be paraded in phrases—through some almost undefinable effect of pace and rhythm, as in the epitaph on his first daughter:

This grave portakes the fleshly birth,
Which cover lightly, gentle earth.
In other words, there is no clear and absolute distinction

one kind of poetry and another, and I am not sure that my attempt to clear the ground and define my march has been much more than the efforts of an unskillful gardenener when the spring is so far advanced: nature is likely to be too much for him. This admission, however, like many admissions of incapacity, serves a strategic purpose. Poems of some, though possibly not all, are certainly not difficult in that they have been selected—difficultly in the creation or the understanding—do, I think, illustrate characteristics of poetry in general, to which I return at the end of this article. Of the rest, I think we shall consider, I shall approach the first two from the point of view of the reader, to suggest the kind of activity that goes on when he reads a poem; the third, I shall approach from the writer's point of view, to suggest, if possible, with regard to the problems of the writer, as he searches to define what at first seems to guide him. And from time to time I shall try to bring some general observations myself from the particular examples.

Since she shall be concerned not only with non-discursive meanings, but with especially elusive ones, we may begin with the uses of silence. The value of silence in a poem, like that of blank space in a painting, depends on what surrounds it. But all poets who make use of, say, the slightest of end-of-line pauses, not less than those modern poets who employ topographical arrangements for silence, pause to consider the meaning of silence. The poet who, knowing how much can be achieved by it—provided, that is, that the reader has the art to obtain it—uses the reader's collaboration. Emily Dickinson, with her frequent use of her peculiar notation—the frequent dashes instead of punctuation, described by one of her critics as "a visual representation of a musical rhythm,"¹ is a poet who has been

have, however, chosen one of her less extreme poems.

There's a certain Slant of light,
Winter Afternoons—
That oppresses, like the Heft
Of Cathedral Tunes—

Heavenly Hurt, it gives us—
We can find no scars,
But internal difference.
Where the Meanings, are—

None may teach it—Any—
'Tis the Soul Despair—
An imperial affliction
Sent us of the Air—

When it comes, the Landscape
listens—
Shadows—hold their breath—
What it goes, 'tis like Distance
On the look of Death—

The spare, directness, is obvious,
and it concentrates attention. Consider how easily the first stanza could have slipped into nineteenth-century poeticality, by regularizing the second line to "some more heavenly word like 'roll' or

best qualified to know, how much of what a poet discovers for us comes about in the labour of composition.¹⁰

That labour is of a peculiar kind, and what one has to say about it applies equally to poems that attempt to capture elusive modes of sentience and to those which have behind them thoughts and feelings that can be at least approximately expressed in more discursive forms. There is, for example, the psychology—the psychology-in-poetry—of William Blake.

Early in the 1930s W. H. Auden declared that "the whole of Freud's teaching may be found in *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*."¹¹ That is perhaps an exaggeration, even though Auden gave some excellent reasons; but one can see why he made this particular connection. Blake's "marriage" notion was to develop a myth expressive of his vision of human life, a myth sufficiently comprehensive to include the workings of the individual psyche, the fluctuations of history, and the social-political upheavals of his own time—the last two of course having their origin in the first. Blake's attempt to trace what David Armstrong calls "the genealogy of the passions" is an

in the so-called Prophetic Books. Now Blake, even though he wrote some admirable prose, ranging from the gnostic to the dramatic, is obviously not a discursive or rationalistic writer. But he was a systematic thinker, and an intense honesty; and with that "stubborn" view of man's nature totally at odds with the major intellectual tradition that descended from the seventeenth century, there was not much available language for his purpose. He tried to create one; and the major figures of his invention—Urizen, Los, the Zoas, and the rest—are virtually technical terms—invented for much the same purpose

The longer poems, from such early things as *The Book of Thel* and *The Vision of the Daughters of Albion* to the long poems that he worked on in the second half of his life, are the record of his attempts to systematize his insights. With the aid of a sensitive and skilled expositor such as John Beer, in *Stake's Humanism*, they are a most instructive and certainly worth the reading. But to speak for myself, the meaning is something one works out and tries to remember: it does not, except in some striking passages, enter the mind as a lived power. And there can be no doubt that the complete success to be found again and again

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